

# Innu language

**Innu-aimun** or **Montagnais** is an Algonquian language spoken by over 10,000 Innu<sup>[3]</sup> in Labrador and Quebec in Eastern Canada. It is a member of the Cree–Montagnais–Naskapi dialect continuum and is spoken in various dialects depending on the community.

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## Literature

Since the 1980s, Innu-aimun has had considerable exposure in the popular culture of Canada and France due to the success of the rock music band Kashtin and the later solo careers of its founders Claude McKenzie and Florent Vollant. Widely heard hit songs with Innu-language lyrics have included "*Ish-kuess*" ("Girl"), "*E Uassiuan*" ("My Childhood"), "*Tipatshimun*" ("Story") and in particular "*Akua tuta*" ("Take care of yourself"), which appeared on soundtrack compilations for the television series *Due South* and the documentary *Music for The Native Americans*. The lyrics of Akua Tuta are featured on over 50 websites, making this one of the most broadly accessible pieces of text written in any native North American language. Florent Vollant has also rendered several well-known Christmas carols into Innu in his 1999 album *Nipaiamianan*.<sup>[4]</sup>

In 2013, "a comprehensive pan-Innu dictionary, covering all the Innu dialects spoken in Quebec and Labrador [was] published in Innu, English and French."<sup>[5]</sup>

## Phonology

Montagnais	
Innu-aimun	
Native to	Canada
Region	Quebec, Labrador
Ethnicity	Innu
Native speakers	10,075, 36% of ethnic population (2016 census) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	<div>Algic <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> Algonquian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Central<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Cree<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Montagnais</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Early form	Old Montagnais
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	moe
Glottolog	mont1268 <span> </span> ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mont1268</span> ) <sup>[2]</sup>
Linguasphere	62-ADA-bb



"Buckle up your children" sign in Innu-aimun, in the Pointe-Parent reserve near Natashquan, Quebec.

Innu-aimun has the following phonemes (written using the standard orthography, with IPA equivalents in brackets):<sup>[6]</sup>

Consonants

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Velar		Glottal
				plain	labial	
Nasal	m /m/	n /n/				
Plosive	p /p/	t /t/	tsh /tʃ/	k /k/	kʷ/ku /kʷ/	
Fricative		ss /s/	sh/s /ʃ/			h /h/
Lateral		(l /l/)				

/l/ is written as **n** in standard orthography and only exists in the western dialects Mashteuiatsh and Betsiamites. Other dialects use /n/ in those positions.<sup>[7]</sup>

The plosives are voiced to [b d dʒ g gʷ] between vowels.

Vowels

There are three pairs of so-called "long" and "short" vowels, and one long vowel with no short counterpart, though the length distinction is giving way to a place distinction. The column titles here refer chiefly to the place of articulation of the long vowel.

	High Front		Mid Front		Mid/Low Central		High Back	
"Long"	ī	[i]	e	[e]	ā	[a]	ū	[o~u]**
"Short"	i	[ɪ~ə~j]			a	[ə~ʌ]*	u	[ʊ~w]

\* [ʌ] particularly before **m**  
\*\* [u] particularly after **i**

Macron accent marks over the long vowels are omitted in general writing. **e** is not written with a macron because there is no contrasting short **e**.

Grammar

Innu-aimun is a polysynthetic, head-marking language with relatively free word order. Its three basic parts of speech are nouns, verbs, and particles. Nouns are grouped into two genders, animate and inanimate, and may carry affixes indicating plurality, possession, obviation, and location. Verbs are divided into four classes based on their transitivity: animate intransitive (AI), inanimate intransitive (II), transitive inanimate (TI), and transitive animate (TA). Verbs may carry affixes indicating agreement (with both subject and object arguments), tense, mood, and inversion. Two different sets, or orders, of verbal affixes are used depending on the verb's syntactic context. In simple main clauses, the verb is marked using affixes of the independent order, whereas in subordinate clauses and content-word questions, affixes of the conjunct order are used.

Dialects

Innu-aimun is related to East Cree (*Īiyū Ayimūn* - Northern/Coastal dialect and *Īnū Ayimūn* - Southern/Inland dialect) spoken by the James Bay Cree of the James Bay region of Quebec and Ontario and the Atikamekw (*Nēhinawēwin* and *Nehirāmowin*) of the Atikamekw ('Nehiraw', 'Nehirowisiw') in the upper Saint-Maurice River valley of Quebec. Innu-aimun is divided into four dialects - Southern Montagnais (Mashteuatsh and Betsiamites), Eastern Montagnais (Mingan, Natashquan, La Romaine, Pakuashipi), Central Montagnais (Sept-Îles and Malietenam, Matimekosh) and Labrador -Montagnais (Sheshatshit).<sup>[8]</sup> The speakers of the different dialects can communicate well with each other. The Naskapi language and culture are quite different from those of the Montagnais,<sup>[9]</sup> in which the dialect changes from y to n as in "Iiyuu" versus "Innu".

## References

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## Notes

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1. Canada, Government of Canada, Statistics. "Aboriginal Mother Tongue (90), Single and Multiple Mother Tongue Responses (3), Aboriginal Identity (9), Registered or Treaty Indian Status (3) and Age (12) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2016 Census - 25% Sample Data" (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=112132&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=122&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>). [www12.statcan.gc.ca](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca). Retrieved 2018-06-09.
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Montagnais" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mont1268>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Lewis, M. Paul; Gary F. Simons; Charles D. Fennig, eds. (2015). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/>) (18th ed.). Dallas, Texas: SIL International.
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7. "The process of spelling standardization of Innu-aimun (Montagnais)" ([http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/ILAC/ILAC\\_21.pdf](http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/ILAC/ILAC_21.pdf)) (PDF)., p. 208

8. Sometimes the dialects are also grouped as follows: Nehilawewin (Western Montagnais, Piyekwâkamî dialect), Leluwewn (Western Montagnais, Betsiamites dialect), Innu-Aimûn (Eastern Montagnais)
9. "Montagnais and Naskapi – FREE Montagnais and Naskapi information | Encyclopedia.com: Find Montagnais and Naskapi research" (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-Montagns.html>). *www.encyclopedia.com*. Retrieved 2016-07-31.

## External links

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- [Online pan-Innu dictionary \(http://dictionary.innu-aimun.ca/Words\)](http://dictionary.innu-aimun.ca/Words)
  - [Innu-aimun.ca \(http://www.innu-aimun.ca\)](http://www.innu-aimun.ca) Information about the language.
  - [Innu Aimun orthography and phonology \(Languagegeek\) \(http://www.languagegeek.com/algorithm/naskapi/inInu.html\)](http://www.languagegeek.com/algorithm/naskapi/inInu.html)
  - [Native Languages page for Montagnais Innu \(http://www.native-languages.org/montagnais.htm\)](http://www.native-languages.org/montagnais.htm)
  - [OLAC resources in and about the Montagnais language \(http://www.language-archives.org/language/moe\)](http://www.language-archives.org/language/moe)
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**This page was last edited on 22 May 2020, at 16:58 (UTC).**

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